

A Lecture / Recital Demonstrating Model Products and Processes for Action

Research in a Middle School General Music Unit on Composition

Prepared by:

Jean Marie Bell

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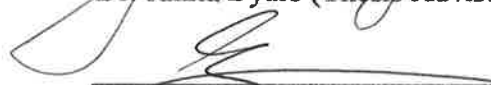
North Carolina at Pembroke

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Approved by:

  
Dr. Janita Byars (Thesis Advisor)

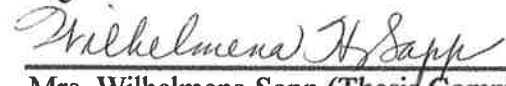
March 21, 2006  
Date

  
Dr. Jonathan Maisonnier (Thesis Committee Member)

3/21/06  
Date

  
Dr. Gary Wright (Thesis Committee Member)

3/21/06  
Date

  
Mrs. Wilhelmena Sapp (Thesis Committee Member)

21 March 2006  
Date

  
Dr. Kathleen Hilton (Dean of Graduate Studies)

March 31, 2006  
Date

## Abstract

According to the National Music Standards (MENC, 1994), students should be composing in their general music classrooms within specific guidelines. The task of composing is not as easily taught or approached in sequential manners that teachers or students feel successful. There is no specific textbook or cookie cutter method that teachers use to train their students to compose.

This project was designed to introduce seventh grade general music students to the process of creating an original melody, and using traditional and nontraditional compositional techniques often associated with theme and variations. Students created an original theme from their name, generated ideas that were implemented in their variations, and developed their creative potential as well as an understanding of music. Through involvement in composing, students took an active approach to the decision making process, exercised divergent thinking skills, utilized problem solving skills, gained knowledge of musical concepts, and improved attitudes.

In conjunction with the action research project, the writer has learned that the process of creation is facilitated by clearly structured compositional activities. Acting as a role model in this process, the writer provided an avenue through which students gained confidence and became more independent learners.

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## Introduction

Middle school general music students do not generally have the opportunity to engage in creative musical experiences. "Many teachers do little or no creative work with their students once they begin teaching" (Cohen, 2002, p. 220). "The limits of what our students can do are very often determined by the limits we place on them" (Ginocchio, 2003, p. 51). Over the span of ten years of teaching and observing students in a middle school setting, the researcher has identified various processes (creative musical activities) and products (performances and musical works) that would facilitate student learning in the area of composition. The researcher proposed to demonstrate and define these processes and products both through her own work and the work of her students in an action research project. This project would measure student learning in a classroom-based composition learning activity.

In addition and closely related to this proposal, the researcher designed a recital program of exemplars in the genre of theme and variations. These works include a piano duet by Franz Joseph Haydn entitled "*Il maestro e lo scolare*," *Seven Variations in C on "God Save The King"* by Ludwig van Beethoven, Dmitri Kabalevsky's "*Variations on an American Folk Song*, Opus 87, No.1," and finally, the debut of her own composition, a theme and variations entitled "*It's All in the Name*." The researcher chose these pieces because the compositions were accessible and the themes were familiar to the students. The combined repertoire gave an historical overview of the development of compositional ideas over the past two hundred years. The study brought to fruition the skills, knowledge and attitudes of students who experienced the art of composition. An



evaluation of the outcomes included recommended practices for music educators for the future.

Another objective for this study was to give students a foundation for compositional experience in general. "If students are to share their ideas musically and become true musical communicators, they need opportunities to compose their own music" (Ginocchio, 2003, p.52). This study provided the sequential instruction that students needed in order to accomplish the complex task of composition.

Few music educators have experience, themselves, in composing music. "There remains illusiveness about composing that causes many persons, and especially teachers, to avoid stepping into what they deem as uncharted waters" (Kennedy, 1999, p. 177). "Teachers seldom possess the skills necessary to promote music composition in their classrooms" (Andrews, 2004, n.p.). This was a major factor contributing to the lack of student experience in the area, as described above. Andrews (2004) also asserted that "music education researchers need to learn more about the experience of composing, in order to inform and assist teachers in designing music programs that successfully foster student composition" (n.p.).

The approach of this study was for the researcher to compose an original piece of music herself and then teach the process to her subjects. Four research questions were explored: 1) What does a survey of educational and research literature identify as appropriate teaching methodologies for the development of compositional skills in the middle school general music classroom? 2) What compositional devices used in the genre of theme and variation can serve as exemplars for subjects? 3) How will subjects identify these model devices and use them to demonstrate creativity in their composition?

4) What changes occur in skill, knowledge, and attitudes as a result of a classroom-based action research project in musical composition in the middle school? Through the activities that address these questions, (the action research project, the related recital/lecture, and the accompanying document), the researcher herein provides greater access for music educators to the processes and information that will facilitate composition in the classroom.

## Review of Literature

In reviewing the literature, the researcher finds that most music instruction in middle schools focuses on acquiring the technical skills of performing and not on composing. Andrews (2004) agrees that "music teachers rarely nurture an environment where subjects compose their own music, primarily because composing is so unfamiliar to them" (n.p.). According to John Kratus (1990) those teachers who have developed activities to stimulate creativity (such as improvising and composing) "lack a scheme for bringing structure and sequence to the learning that occurs...a set of clearly articulated goals and objectives must be developed to guide creative learning" (p. 33). "Unfortunately, the music profession does not fully understand the nature of musical creativity, and consequently is not a vibrant component of music education" (Andrews, 2004, n.p.).

Peter Webster (1994) divides the act of composing into a number of distinct stages. The preparation stage is characterized by divergent thought processes and the generation of ideas. A period of reflection on these ideas (incubation) is followed by a period of illumination where ideas are worked out in a more convergent, linear manner. Kratus (1989) describes the compositional process specifically for composing music in four stages: Exploration, Development, Repetition, and Silence (p. 9). However, "many composers report progressing through various stages as they work, often beginning with a 'germinal' idea and moving through stages involving sketching ideas, making drafts, elaboration and refinement before the final draft" (Bennet, 1976, p. 7). Andrews (2004) notes,

Research on the compositional process offers the potential for finding the missing link in music education; that is, the writing of music by subjects within the school

curriculum. Employing the knowledge of “how composers compose” as the basis for creativity in the curriculum could have substantial benefits for a variety of stakeholders in music and the arts (n.p.).

Many composers say that a major stimulus for composing is the act of composing itself. “Influences such as ideas, concepts, beliefs or art works can stimulate or influence a composer’s thinking. These creative ideas spring from combinations, alterations or associations with existing ideas,” according to Mcilwain (2002, n.p.). The working process can stimulate motivation, increase knowledge and experience, and develop aptitudes (Mcilwain, n.p.).

Creativity is a major part of the compositional process. In order to encourage more creative thinking, Hickey (1997) suggests that “teachers can explain the compositional techniques that have been used by composers in the music they are currently performing...point them out and assign related compositional activities” (p. 19). Belkin (1990) describes creativity as “an acquired behavior – learnable, teachable, tangible and crucial to human development...in problem solving and for inventing rich imaginative worlds” (p. 29). Webster (1990) summarizes, “Creative thinking, then, is a dynamic mental process that alternates between divergent (imaginative) and convergent (factual) thinking, moving in stages over time” (p. 28). If creativity is a dynamic teachable process, then teachers in general music classes can foster their subjects’ creativity through musical composition.

There is much to be gained through understanding music’s structure. Wikipedia (2005) defines musical form as “the structure of a particular piece, how its parts are put together to create the whole. The form of a piece produces balance, unity, variety contrast and connection” (n.p.). Larsen (2005) states that:

Sounds become music when the rhythm or melody is shaped into larger structures or forms according to the principles of design: unity, variety, repetition, emphasis, and pattern. Familiarity with these principles and with common forms is essential to understanding the structure of music and its relationship to other art forms (p. 3).

Kashub (1997) adds, "The most important aspect of the compositional process is that sound and musical thought are emphasized as key factors. Notational skills can be developed once creative thought has been exercised" (p. 29). The unfolding of music composition is represented by means of rhythm, melody, harmony and through the succession of music's building blocks such as motives and phrases. These elements are found in the musical form of theme and variations. Frisch (2005, n.p.) quoted Johannes Brahms,

Writing variations is something good for the beginner. The best way to understand how music is written and structured is by imitation. When you compose, it is good for a beginner to copy or follow a particular structure of a piece or a style of a composer; this way you can discover how a composition is created or constructed and apply this to your own ideas

Theme and variations, which balance on repetition and change, provide significant compositional options, in which a theme is stated, then altered or varied in successive statements. Techniques such as ornamentation, transposition, inversion, permutation, retrograde motion, augmentation, diminution and rhythmic modification (Wikipedia, n.p.) provide the tools. The theme may be either borrowed or original, usually eight bars in length. The theme should be "harmonically straightforward...the phrase structure should be clear, and more often are binary structures, with some mild rounding off" (Belkin, 1999, p. 38). The variations can be altered through harmonic, melodic, rhythmic and/or contrapuntal changes. Variations may be "freestanding or independent pieces, most often for solo keyboard or orchestra and chamber combinations,

or movements in a larger work such as a symphony or piano sonata” (Satie, p. 536). The number of variations in a set is frequently twelve, except for Bach’s thirty *Goldberg Variations*, and Beethoven’s thirty-three *Diabelli Variations* (Classical Music Pages, n.p.). Variations may be grouped on the basis of similar rhythmic patterns, figurations, modes, or any other common element. To avoid predictability, several consecutive variations may successively accelerate or become denser in texture (Belkin, 1999, p. 39). Variety in texture and rhythm will usually be an important aesthetic element.

The closure of variation form requires special attention. The last variation often expands into a coda, sometimes brief, sometimes expansive. “It is usually set off from the others by breaking from the theme’s structural mold. The change can be as simple as adding a cadential extension or casting the entire final movement in another form, such as a fugue or a sonata” (Belkin, 1999, p. 39).

There are two types of variation forms, *continuous*, where one variation follows another without interruption, and *sectional*, where a series of individual, closed short pieces are separated by brief pauses. All of the selections chosen for this study were sectional variations.

In the review of literature, the researcher found limited research in the area of compositional activities for middle school subjects and identified (Vermont Midi Project) a single direct reference to the utilization of theme and variations. This action research plan is designed to build on that limited body of information in the context of what has been established as a valuable compositional technique.

## Analysis of Compositions Used in This Study

*"Il maestro e lo scolare"*  
Franz Joseph Haydn (1732 – 1809)

Haydn recommended imitation for a beginning composer or performer as one of the best ways to understand how music was written and structured. Bergamini (1991, n.p.) believed that the beginner first discovers how a composition is created or constructed, then he/she applies this knowledge to his/her own ideas, breaks out of a mold, and develops his/her own style of composition with new insight. The straightforward form of theme and variation serves as such a model.

Haydn wrote "Il maestro e lo scolare," in 1778, at the beginning of his long employment by Prince Esterhazy as Kapellmeister. During that time, Haydn experimented with various ideas including motivic development and humor and took advantage of access to a resident orchestra. At this time, the aristocracy served as music patrons who directed composers to provide music for special occasions and social functions. Although in the employ of nobility, Haydn demonstrated great wit and humor, innovation and inspiration that the whole world could understand.

"In Haydn, there are themes, greatly varied in emotional color, which move with freedom and are altered and elaborated with great imagination" (Cross, 1969, p. 489). There is a "greater expansiveness of form and increasing richness of thematic growth" (p. 495). Haydn worked to uncover new ways of expressing himself in his music. He generated ideas through his piano improvisations. "I would sit down [at the piano] and begin to improvise, whether my spirit were sad or happy, serious or playful. Once I had captured an idea, I strove with all my might to develop and sustain it in conformity with the rules of art" (Fisk, 1956, n.p.). The "ideas" he decided to capture were framed and

written in the score. "The Haydn approach to composition is to be inspired by improvisation, and then proceed inward to compose according to one's subjective understanding of theory, aesthetics, and architecture" (Dallman, 2003, n.p.). He composed according to his own taste, but also according to rationally formed "rules of art." Haydn did not see these rules as constraints but frequently experimented, bending the rules, always trying to uncover new ways of expressing himself in his music.

*Seven Variations in C on "God Save the King"*  
*Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827)*

The tune and text of "God Save the King" were first presented as a gift to King James III of England in 1745 and later became a model for anthems and hymns of other countries. Today, the tune is recognized by American students as "My Country, 'Tis of Thee." This tune is adopted by Liechtenstein as its national anthem. Ludwig van Beethoven borrowed this tune and wrote seven variations. Variations 1 through 5 are in  $\frac{4}{4}$  meter; the last two, 6 and 7, are in  $\frac{3}{4}$ . The coda is enlarged "to such an extent that it seems like an added movement" (Bauer, 1939, p. 296).

As a freelance composer, Beethoven created these variations in order to gain popularity based on patriotic appeal and an opportunity to sell his music. People at this time began to express independent thought. "Composers began to employ new forms and to compose from the heart, writing powerful music with rich melodies and deeply-expressed feelings" (Bauer, 1939, p. 294). Beethoven was a model for other composers, pointing the way for personal expression and "bridging music to maturity so that it expressed not only forms of life, but life itself" (Bauer, 1939, p. 304). Unfortunately, Beethoven was dealing with emotions due to the tragic loss of his hearing. Against all



odds, he persisted and continued to compose various other pieces during this time period such as the *Waldstein* and *Appassionata* piano sonatas, and the *Eroica* symphony.

*Variations on an American Folk Theme* Op. 87, No. 1  
Dimitri B. Kabalevsky (1904-1987)

Known for his outstanding work in music education, Dimitri Kabalevsky wrote many works for young performers. A Russian composer, he is known for his teaching pieces for piano. Kabalevsky infused his compositions with the traditional music of his native country, often making use of Russian folk melodies. However, Kabalevsky's *Variations on an American Folk Theme*, Op. 87, No. 1, was inspired by the American lullaby, "All the Pretty Little Horses." A simple ABA theme is introduced in both the right and left hand, taking turns, creating a "rocking motion." This rocking motion is evident with the use of major-minor interplay, especially in major-minor keys, neighboring intervals and major-minor chords. All six variations are in the meter of  $\frac{2}{4}$ . Beginning with Variation 1, the melody moves to the right hand. The tempo is slightly faster with *poco piu mosso*, while the theme utilizes neighboring and passing tones. In Variation 2, more motion is designated with a tempo marking of *scherzando*. The theme is playfully bounced around by contrasts of dynamics and of *legato* and *marcato* markings. This technique represents tension in the child's restless sleeping pattern. In Variation 3, Kabalevsky uses scale passages and diminution, embellishing the simple tune. The bass line uses a three note staccato sequence that climbs into accented open fifths. The variation ends with a repetitive octave pattern. Variation 4 comes in boldly (*con bravura*) with the melody in the left hand and with staccato tone clusters in the right hand. Each motive is stated in four measure segments, trading registers until finally cascading down the keyboard to low C. In this variation Kabalevsky uses dissonant

techniques with clusters, seconds and fourths, and dynamic contrasts to create tension. In Variation 5, less motion (*poco meno mosso*) brings the stately dotted eighth-sixteenth-eighth-note motive to life, portraying a prancing horse. Kabalevsky utilizes the technique of crossing hands to play the major-minor interplay of chords and open thirds. In Variation 6, Kabalevsky creates a dreamy, sleepy mood through a tempo change to *andante cantabile*. The left hand plays the melody as the right hand rocks back and forth between major and minor seventh chords. Various compositional techniques include contrasts in dynamics, register, and use of chromaticism. Major-minor tonalities (between C Major and c minor) and repetition come together to create a dream-like mood. Finally, the original theme is stated in octaves and tranquilly returns through a transition to c minor.

“His (Kabalevsky’s) music speaks in a simple tongue that can be easily understood by all who enjoyed it” (Cross, 1969, p. 527). His melodies are rich and lyrical with lively, energetic rhythms. Under Soviet reign, composers had to follow a set of guide rules “as to their choice of subject and treatment of it” (Cross, 1969, p. 528). The music must reflect the ideals of the state and the spirit of the people. Music was not to be “an expression of his own being,” but some “political and social objectives of the U.S.S.R.” (Cross, 1969, p. 528). Unfortunately, this did not allow room for creativity; however, the theme and variation form provided a structure that safely maximized creative input.

*"It's All in the Name"*  
*Jean Marie Bell (1964 - )*

The inspiration for this composition came from the composer's first name, Jean Marie. The composition represents a personal journey through the composer's life from childhood to adulthood. Character and emotions play an important role in each variation. Each variation was crafted over a period of nine months. The creativity of the composer is reflected in the titles of each variation, as well as in the compositional techniques demonstrated in each variation. The composition title is simple, but unique, showing individuality and "ownership" of one's name.

The theme is spelled out in a unique set of pitches from the musical alphabet chart (see Appendix C). J=C, E=E, A=A, and N=G, hence the tune begins: C, E, A, G. However, not liking the minor tonality, the composer alters pitches, raising both the C and G one-half step and moving the tune to the key of A major. The theme consists of three sections in the meter of  $\frac{4}{4}$ . The A section introduces the name J E A N M A R I E in four measures. A1 restates the name again, changing J, E, and the last E to the octave; and A2 states her name in a three-note motive, A-G sharp-A. The composer's last name B-E-L-L ends the section an octave higher to depict "bell-like" tones, ending on the half-cadence. The accompaniment follows an arpeggiated eighth note pattern using I, IV, and vi chord progressions throughout the theme, ending on the dominant note. The composer uses melodic and rhythmic repetition to create a sense of unity in the theme.

The first variation, titled "Namin' Notes," is a play on words - a representation of the composer's name spelled with eighth notes. The composer uses her first name in a rhythmic eighth note motive, utilizing the compositional techniques of diminution and

passing tones. The variation ends with the “bell-like” tone figure, played an octave higher than written.

“Haydn Seek” is a variation full of frolic and humor, written with Haydn in mind. Use of sequential thirds, rhythmic imitation, and sequencing are found throughout this variation. The composer has “hidden” her name within the first four measures. Repetition brings the variation together creating a sense of unity. Contrast is represented by register changes in the treble clef in the last eight measures. The three-note pattern (A - G sharp - A) found in the second section of the theme appears again in the last four measures. This time the left hand takes a turn and plays the motive.

The next variation, “Playful Child,” is a descriptive piece of music, alluding to a child at playtime. While growing up, the composer’s parents always told her to play inside the fence. As any curious child would, she took risks and chose to go “outside the fence” into the unknown. This variation represents that child going beyond the fence, further and further away from home, seeking all she could to enjoy her playtime more. The left hand starts on A and “sneaks” down to the lowest part of the piano where no other young piano player normally plays. The descending staccato notes eventually lead the player down to the bottom key on the piano. The right hand is in contrast, playing in different registers, covering the keyboard with playful gestures of legato and staccato patterns of the composer’s first name. The composer’s last name is nowhere in sight.

“Lament for Dad” was written in memory of the composer’s father who died when she was just a young teenager. She expressed that heartfelt sorrow in this minor variation. As with tradition, composers usually write at least one variation in a minor key. Here, her feelings are expressed in the intervals of major and minor seconds, open

fifths, and broken chords. Emotions overcome her in the rubato section. Cascading sixteenth notes create a melodic sequential descent, relinquishing teardrops held back over the years. The broken chord progression (i-VI-iv-V-i) is repeated in the left hand. This variation uses the unique compositional technique of permutation where the composer chooses a random order of letters found in her name to create the variation.

The longest variation, "Spanish Spice," returns to the key of A major. A rhythmic ostinato pattern of dotted eighth and sixteenth notes holds this variation together. The right hand takes the melody in sequential thirds, creating a festive Spanish mood. As the second section begins, rhythmic patterns change in the left hand ostinato, switching to a multitude of eighth and sixteenth rhythms. This rhythm arrangement adds a little "seasoning" to the mood of the piece. Inspiration for this variation stemmed from the composer's college days when she would listen to tapes of the trumpet player, Chuck Mangione.

The next variation idea comes from her humorous music director at church. Being new to the church, the director was unsure of the praise band members' names. Instead of calling her Jean Marie, he deliberately called her "Mean Jarie." The variation follows the pitches as such. The name has stuck without any harm to the composer. This variation is in a two-part form, depicting her changing moods. The A section proclaims her happiness in A major and quickly changes into anger in a minor in the B section. Her anger is illustrated in the deliberate ascending four-note ostinato pattern. This section gradually *crescendos* and *ritards* to the end of the variation. The use of dynamics, tempo changes, and modulation creates contrast throughout the piece. This variation represents times of spiritual and emotional turmoil in the composer's life.

The representation of the number three plays an important role in the next variation entitled, "3 on 3," where the melody is hidden in the right hand. The composer's favorite number is three and is represented by dotted half notes, triads, and a Picardy third on the final chord. This variation begins in A major and gracefully modulates to A minor in the seventh measure. This lush variation thrives on rubato and on seventh and ninth chords, emulating the passion of the romantic style.

"Piggyback Track" is a "fun" variation to play. The name theme is arranged in "pig latin" (EANJA ARIEMA) creating yet another variation. This time the meter is  $\frac{6}{8}$  and the key returns once again to A major. The ostinato accompaniment rocks to and fro with an eighth note pattern of A - G sharp resolving to the A - F sharp. The illustration portrays the effect of a "piggy back" ride. The melody in the treble clef uses diminution, giving the illusion that the "ride" is going somewhat faster. The ostinato pattern keeps the whole "ride" under control, being careful not to go off the tracks.

The final variation, "Bell Chimes," is played last for a reason. Obviously, "Bell," being the composer's last name, fits the part in announcing the end of the composition. The melodic theme is built on the compositional technique, retrograde, spelling out her first name backwards. The open fifths uniquely create the "back and forth" swaying motion of the bells. The opening left hand accompaniment spells out her last name, "B-e-l-l," in whole notes, implying augmentation. Repetition, retrograde and augmentation provide this variation with its variety.

## Compositional Processes

### *Inspiration*

Composers are inspired by various means and states of consciousness. Each composer has a unique set of sources for inspiration. Hindson (2001, n.p.) defines inspiration as “generally having an idea that influences the total structure and background to whatever you write, giving you a frame on which to hang your musical material.” He continues by stating that “the particular musical choices that you make in the inspirational stages provide a large bearing on the end product.” Ideas can emerge from poetry, short stories, folklore, painting, sketches, nature, sculpture, photographs, dance, and current events. Individual compositions can represent the traits of a character in a story, event, or the death of a loved one. For some composers, inspiration just happens. In the article, “Turning Silence into Sound” (DeNardi, 2001, n.p.), Peter Sculthorpe, an Australian composer, states that his inspiration comes from “unexpected sources, at any time, at breakfast, while I'm driving, and never at the piano, like some composers.” DeNardi (n.p.) also adds, “Composers like Beethoven were occasionally inspired by someone or something, but mostly they relied on the impact of their harmonic structure and development sections to evoke emotion.” While these composers have produced music in different idioms, they rely on that spark which activates the imagination into musical creativity.

Music composition is a process, a “work in progress.” Hindson (2001) reports “some composers prefer to generate material bit by bit from their initial inspirations,” (n.p.) and some composers may work from beginning to end or on certain sections. Webster (2005) suggests starting with a poem or story as a motivator. “Sometimes the

meter of a poem suggests a good music parallel” (n.p.). Ginocchio (2003) suggests beginning the composition process by inventing a melody. “Melody-writing exercises are an excellent starting place for teaching composition. To students who are new to composition, even simple melodic exercises are not all that simple” (Ginocchio, 2003, p. 52). “The composer should learn the rules before breaking them. Otherwise they do not know what it is they are doing, and good composition is a combination of inspiration and knowledgeable craftsmanship” (Balkin, 1990, n.p). The fuel that sparks inspiration is as important as the process that creates the final product.

### *Musical Signatures*

Though some composers show ownership by placing their signature on their music, others show ownership by placing their name *within* their music. “Composers often put their signature into their pieces of music by working out the letters in their name which can be turned into musical notes. By doing this, they create an individual musical signature which can be woven into the musical fabric of a piece” (Knotts, 2006, n.p.). J.S. Bach used the musical notes to his last name, B flat-A-C-B natural, in the last piece he wrote called “*The Art of Fugue*.” Dimitri Shostakovich used a four-note motive signature, D for Dimitri, and E flat-C-B, to represent Shostakovich. This motive dominates his “String Quartet No. 8.” Edward Elgar, building the theme on the rhythm of his name, paints musical pictures of his thirteen friends and a dog in *The Enigma Variations*.

### *Models of Composition*

Composing is a mysterious process – one can imagine musical ideas coming into the mind, but how are they developed? To investigate this process, the researcher studied



the written material that composers produced as well as other sources that concerned their working processes.

Due to his deafness, Beethoven was forced to give up playing in public and focused on composition. In the article, "Investigating How Composer's Compose," Halliwell (2005) reported that "Beethoven worked extremely slowly and laboriously. Often accompanied by notebooks, he would jot down ideas as they occurred to him in his barely decipherable handwriting" (n.p.). Beethoven began with detailed planning, "often copying out works in a similar 'genre' by other composers. He followed this by sketching, drafting, reworking and revising" (n.p.). The reality is that a composition will probably need to be altered many times before the product is complete. It is important for subjects to be given that opportunity to express divergent thought and to find more than one route to a solution. Through a review of the literature, the researcher has found several models of the composition process, most of which relate it to design on problem-solving tasks. Ultimately, there are many ways to plan a composition. There is no standard compositional procedure for subjects to follow or to guarantee success. A method that works for one piece or one composer may not be suitable for another.

#### *Theme and Variations*

Research reveals that composers use several methods of variation to develop their melodies. "These techniques include inversions, sequences, mode changes, diminution, augmentation, rhythmic change, and structural note analysis" (Ginocchio, p. 53). Once subjects studied, understood and recognized these techniques in exemplary compositions, they used these techniques in their own compositions.

## Action Research

### *School and Student Demographics*

Albritton Junior High is a part of the Department of Defense school system located on Fort Bragg, North Carolina, the second largest military base in the United States. The population consists of 616 students broken down into three different grade levels: 261 seventh graders, 217 eighth graders and 132 ninth graders. The average length of enrollment of a student ranges from one to three years due to the transient nature of a military school system. Students attending this school come from all over the world, bringing with them diverse backgrounds of culture, experiences and skills. Students are exposed to various types of methodologies and ways of thinking and are challenged in their daily progress for success. They come to school with many distractions that hinder their learning.

Approximately 30% of the population has a parent that is deployed to the Middle East. Families are of a low socio-economic level and seek financial assistance, especially in the area of free and reduced-priced lunches. There are 92 students who eat free lunch everyday and 140 students who get reduced rates. There are a total of 77 Special Education students who are mainstreamed into special area classes and receive specific services such as one-on-one aides, transportation to and from school, and other accommodations. The student makeup of Albritton creates a unique mixture of cultures with African Americans (219), Asian (12), Native American (22), Pacific Islander (10), White (245), Multi-racial (37), Unknown (70), and Hispanic (109). The seventh grade class has 145 males and 120 females, the largest class in the school. Included in these

numbers are our gifted students which number 29 in all, with 11 in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, 13 in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and 5 in 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

### *Methodology*

In this study of composition, the action researcher concentrated on the development of the subjects' creative potential through the musical form, theme and variations. The researcher chose three examples of theme and variation compositions by well-known composers. Subjects were introduced to exemplar compositions on Haydn's "*Il maestro e scolare*," Beethoven's *Seven Variations in C on "God Save the King"* and Kabalevsky's "*Variations on an American Folk Theme, Opus 87, No.1.*" Each piece was introduced to subjects by the researcher via live piano performance or through various recorded media. Classroom discussions generated ideas regarding what might have provoked a composer to write a specific piece. Subjects studied thematic contour and discovered each composer's creative application of variation form techniques. The researcher chose to study the compositional techniques of theme and variation form because subjects could easily understand the concept of patterns, and therefore transfer their learning and understanding into their original compositions.

To meet the requirements of the project, many students used their own keyboards. The classroom only had four keyboards and a piano for a class size of 20-24 subjects. Some students took advantage of additional opportunities to come to the music room during lunch periods or after school. During the regular class period, students rotated activities by either writing in their journals, generating ideas on the keyboard or staff paper, copying their music into Finale Notepad, or working through musical problems.

In writing out melodies, the subjects encountered letters that represented multiple pitches. Classroom discussions led the subjects to raise solutions such as raising the note to the octave, altering the pitch by making it flat (or sharp), or retaining the letter as the same note. Subjects' names are not all the same length, resulting in a variety of meters. The rhythms subjects chose also helped determine their meter.

The researcher had several students with severe learning disabilities who could only figure out their names using the alphabet chart. Most students with disabilities could notate the letters into quarter notes and place them on the treble clef staff properly. Others had problems accurately notating the rhythms they played on the keyboard. The researcher provided additional practice in rhythmic dictation to enable the success of these students.

#### *Action Research Lesson Plan*

The initial step was to receive permission from the principal to proceed with the action research plan. A Parental Consent Form (see Appendix A) was devised, signed by the principal, and sent home with the subjects involved in the study. All subjects returned parental consent forms to participate in the study.

Prior to beginning this lesson, subjects have had experience with basic musical concepts and with reading simple rhythmic and melodic notation. The researcher developed a pre-instructional questionnaire (see Appendix B) to determine the subjects' experience in the areas of skills, knowledge and attitudes concerning composition. Information gathered from the subjects' questionnaires guided the researcher in planning sequential lesson activities that supported and directed her action research project.

The researcher taught standard notation to subjects in order to notate their original composition on staff paper. Subjects then created a word bank from the letters contained in the musical alphabet. The subjects chose three words and spelled them out in quarter notes on the treble staff. The researcher introduced simple piano skills to subjects in order to play their melodies. Subjects randomly identified pitches above and below middle C (including accidentals) and played a C major scale from the treble staff with correct fingerings. Subjects played their words on the piano within a two-octave range. Subjects identified phrase patterns within major and minor melodies. Melodic intervals were also explored through listening lessons and writing examples from staff worksheets.

Subjects learned how melodies fit into the structure of a musical composition by listening to various musical forms (ostinato, binary, ternary, rondo, arch, and theme and variation). The researcher used analogies to help subjects relate to musical forms outside the musical context first and then applied that concept to musical forms. Subjects participated in listening activities that allowed them to discover the form of a piece of music. Subjects held up colored shaped letters (A, B, C, and D) representing different sections found in simple forms (ex. AAAA, AB, ABA, ABACA and ABCBA). Subjects made a list on the board of various changes heard in the music. Those changes were rhythm, voicing, tempo, manipulation of words, mood, key changes, meter, instrumentation, texture, dynamics, and style. These techniques were copied into subject's notebooks for future use in their compositions.

The researcher introduced and defined the musical form, theme and variations. Subjects listened to a simple melody everyone recognized as "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," but had not previously known that Mozart composed twelve variations on this

familiar tune. The researcher played the Mozart variations on the piano. While listening, subjects listed compositional techniques they heard in the music. The subjects shared their findings in a classroom discussion.

Other compositional techniques (retrograde, imitation, augmentation, inversion, and diminution) were studied and demonstrated in famous pieces composed by Haydn, Beethoven, and Kabalevsky. Subjects again listened and documented the compositional techniques used by these well-known composers in notebooks. The researcher played her own theme and variation composition. Subjects were instructed to analyze and identify unique compositional techniques in her variations. By role modeling, the researcher supported the realization by her subjects that anyone who understands these musical concepts can demonstrate his/her creativity by manipulating a theme in order to compose his/her own piece of music. Sternberg (1996) puts it best, stating that "the most powerful way to develop creativity in your subjects is to be a role model. Children develop creativity not when you tell them to, but when you show them" (n.p.)

In order to begin the compositional process, subjects created an original melody using their names as the basis for the theme. The selected pitches corresponded with the musical alphabet chart created by the researcher (see Appendix C). Subjects were given guidelines by which to write their theme and variation composition. Subjects' name themes were to be written in quarter notes on the treble staff, separating the first, middle (optional) and last names with quarter rests. Each subject chose a meter suitable for his/her name theme and created two variations utilizing various compositional techniques discussed in class. Subjects made a choice to include sixteenth, eighth, quarter, half, whole, and dotted notes into their melodic variations. The theme was to be four to eight

measures long and to follow the pitches found in their names. Each variation had to be four to twelve measures in length, depending on the particular technique the student used. Subjects were encouraged by the researcher to use as many different compositional techniques as possible. Subjects notated their theme and variations on *My Composition* staff paper (see Appendix D). The subjects were given help when requested, and progress was checked daily. Subjects shared their strategies in solving melodic and rhythmic problems with others. The subjects were instructed in using notation software, Finale Notepad 2005, a free download from the website, [www.codamusic.com](http://www.codamusic.com). When projects were completed on staff paper, subjects notated their compositions into Finale Notepad to print a professional looking composition, including a title and their name as the composer. A composition rubric (see Appendix E) was given to each subject, highlighting areas more heavily weighted in assessing their learning.

Subjects were given a period of three weeks to complete this project. The researcher found subjects actively participating in the compositional process. Subjects rotated compositional activities throughout the class period. Subjects were either involved in composing on staff paper, experimenting at the electronic keyboards, or writing about their compositional experiences in reflective journals. Subjects wrote about their role as a composer, their solutions to problems that occurred, and their feelings about what they were doing. Subject journals were placed in their Language Arts portfolios at the conclusion of the project. The researcher observed some subjects did not finish writing their compositions, complete a reflective journal, nor finalize their composition in the notational software, Finale Notepad 2005a (see Appendix F).

Final compositions were debuted during the last two days of the quarter. The researcher videotaped subjects' performances on the piano and electronic keyboards. Each performer played his/her name theme and variations (some adding his/her own title to their composition) before an audience of subjects, the principal and the assistant superintendent. Before the subjects performed their variations, they described the compositional techniques they used in their variations. At the completion of the project, subjects filled out a post-informational questionnaire. After the final performance, each composition was graded according to the rubric. Subjects handed in their reflective journals, *My Composition* staff worksheet (Appendix D), *My Composition* rubric (Appendix E) and a printed composition copy from the notation software, Finale Notepad 2005a (Appendix F). Subjects handed in what they completed for the project. The researcher reviewed the video taped performances, read through subjects' journals, analyzed subjects' compositions, and completed *My Composition* rubric. After the data was compiled, all papers were stapled together and distributed to subjects' Language Arts teachers and placed in their personal portfolios.

### *Assessments*

#### *Composition rubric.*

Evaluation is an important part of any creative process. Subjects need to feel that their work has some merit. The composition rubric has been designed as a guideline to address areas of knowledge the researcher identified for each student to learn as a result of writing an original theme and variation. Appendix D is an assessment that acknowledges individual student growth. Broomhead (2006) agrees that "the students perform better when they're aware of intended outcomes. Clearly articulating these



[outcomes] allows students to mentally prepare themselves for the kind of learning we hope will take place" (p. 54). Broomhead also states that "by presenting students with intended outcomes upfront, we enable students to better work with us toward achieving these outcomes" (p. 54).

*My Composition* rubric included five categories: Composing Theme and Variations, Melodic Notation, Rhythmic Notation, Journal Reflections, and Performance. These categories were rated on a Likert scale from 4 – 1, (4 being the highest score). Each category was weighted in the order of importance with Composing = 10, Journal Reflections = 7, both Melodic and Rhythmic Notation = 3, and Performance = 2. Scores were determined by the number multiplied by the category weight. When added together, the total of the combined categories gave the students their overall score.

#### *Student performances.*

"A teacher will find no better way to get subjects excited about music than to have them play their own music" (Hickey, 1997, p. 17). When student compositions were shared in a class performance, subjects experienced a sense of pride in their work. This experience served as a public validation of their work and effort. The performance also showed the audience what subjects learned and what they were capable of creating. This was an opportunity to have each student "shine" as he/she performed his/her very first music composition in public. Performers were videotaped for further study and served as documentation for future projects.

## *Student Compositional Processes*

### *Brainstorming*

Brainstorming is a technique, which involves generating a list of ideas in a creative, unstructured manner. The goal of brainstorming is to generate as many ideas as possible in a short period of time. The key tool in brainstorming is "piggybacking," or using one idea to stimulate other ideas. During the brainstorming process, all ideas are taken into consideration. After a long list of ideas is generated, one can go back and review the ideas to critique their value or merit. This relates to *preparation*, the first stage of Webster's model of creative thinking in music.

Inexperienced musicians may simply be overwhelmed when asked to compose without guidelines or rules. Webster (2005) favors exercises that start with very limited requirements "where students play with one parameter only while keeping others constant. For example, the teacher creates a harmonic progression and students add melodies that sound good or vice versa" (n.p.). Research shows that middle school students can effectively compose short pieces "within specified guidelines" (MENC, 1994) on familiar tunes such as "Brother John," "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" and "Happy Birthday." Ginocchio (2003) suggests that "students begin by writing melodies based on their impressions of different pieces for literature, art, photography, and world events" (p. 52). As subjects' melodic-writing skills improve, "they can add other musical characteristics, such as melodic variation, expressive qualities, vocabulary, and harmonic writing to their work." Depending on the subjects' knowledge, subjects would use a limited set of notes by writing only in a certain key or mode, or within a single octave of pitches. Ginocchio (2003) also mentions that it may be helpful to "limit the types of note

values or rhythms that can be used" (p. 52). "Composition is an art and a craft. For each student, it represents an unfolding of their creative impulse" (Viemeister, 2005, n.p.). Ginocchio (2003) finds that "melodic exercises are a great way to encourage creativity as well as teach many musical concepts. Subjects can learn a great deal about music by "trying to come up with alternative forms of their melodies" (p. 53). "A set of variations on a theme is fun to start with because it requires little development. Each variation is its own compact piece and the whole set holds together well without becoming complicated" (Viemeister, 2005, n.p.). "Prior to any composing experience, students need to engage in sufficient performing and listening experiences to help them frame the work they are being asked to do" (Wiggins, 2005, p. 39).

Setting restrictions on student compositions is helpful to the beginning composer. Common restrictions found by the researcher are simple meters, use of simple rhythmic patterns, one or two keys, length of composition, register, and whole, half, quarter, and eighth note values. The researcher found that using specified parameters provided a guide for subjects to work through the compositional task. Guiding subjects through the process avoided confusion and provided a sequence for learning.

### *Exploration and Play*

Writing a piece of music requires dedication and experimentation. Stuart Brown (2000), founder of The Institute of Play, believes that "play is hard wired into our genetic code. We want to play because it's instructive and fundamental to human existence" (n. p.). Brown suggests the components of play (curiosity, discovery, risk-taking, trial and error, pretense, and other more complex adaptive activities) are the same components of learning. Brown (2000) describes learning through play as

Trying things this way and that, and then trying them again. It means changing your perspective, trying the intuitive instead of the logical, and thinking outside whatever box you are in. It is peppered with humor, motion, questions, and theories to be tried out. It produces unexpected discoveries. Gaining knowledge of play's deeper meaning allows us to gain greater benefits in our individual, group and political lives (n.p.).

In essence, play helps us to learn and demonstrate creativity.

Learning to play the piano challenged subjects at first, but once they practiced and kept trying, they found that playing was not as hard as they thought and wanted to play even more. Subjects played around with different rhythms and styles to see what worked or which one sounded best. This took a considerable amount of time but was an important part of the composing process. It was also important to require that subjects write something they could read and play according to their level of learning.

#### *Reflections and Revisions*

"It is important to teach young composers to be self-critical of their music" (Garcia, 2005, n.p.). Some days the subjects stepped back from their work and returned the next day with a fresh point of view. Subject's experiences and ideas were recorded in reflective journals. Having students reflect on their experience served three purposes: first, it gave students a voice in telling about their compositional experiences; second, it helped students make meaning of their learning and third, it assisted the teacher in evaluating and planning for future projects.

At times the researcher encouraged subjects to reconsider completed work and to explore other ways to shape their musical material. This is perhaps where learning was at its peak. Subjects were encouraged to understand that composing was a "work in progress" and that many revisions would occur before the project had reached

completion. Ultimately, reflections and revisions helped subjects find their unique voices as composers.

*Student Creativity: Convergent and Divergent Thinking Skills*

Composing a piece of music is not an easy task. It involves higher order thinking and creativity skills not normally utilized in the classroom. Divergent thinking requires the problem-solver to generate many solutions (i.e. brainstorming). Subjects began with the word “form” itself. They had to think of as many words as possible that included the word “form” in it (ex. *uniform*, *performance*, and *formula*). Subjects also created words from the musical alphabet and played them on the piano. Subjects exercised divergent thinking not only in the act of composing itself, but also in the use of the musical alphabet and the English alphabet to create an original music composition. Subjects used their names to create a melodic theme and manipulated pitches to create variations utilizing flexibility. In convergent thought, “ideas are melded together and focus on solving a problem,”...“thoughts may assume a new organizational pattern, leading one to an expected end result or answer” (Kashub, 1997, p. 27). Subjects were able to weave in and out of divergent and convergent thought patterns as they created their own unique compositions. When subjects completed their compositions, they placed a title on their piece of music. Some titles were original (“My Name” and “This Is Me”) and some were quite creative (“Unique” and “A Funny Jingle”).

## Recital

The first selection of the demonstration recital is a Haydn duet for piano, four hands, entitled *Il maestro e lo scolare* (The teacher and the pupil). This divertimento is composed for pedagogical purposes and is performed in one's home for the purposes of listening and performing. The duet opens with an *Andante* and seven variations during which the teacher plays a phrase and the pupil repeats the same phrase two octaves higher. The form of this piece is rounded binary with each variation in  $\frac{2}{4}$  meter. Variations techniques used by Haydn include imitation, ornamentation, register, diminution, repetition and crossing of hands. The work closes with a simple minuet without trio, and Haydn refrains from further using the imitative principle. Fitting for the piece, the researcher has chosen her piano instructor at UNCP, Dr. Jonathan Maisonnier, to accompany her on this duet.

The second piece is chosen due to its familiarity to middle school subjects. Beethoven's *Seven Variations in C on "God Save the King,"* published in 1804, was mistakenly recognized by subjects as "My Country 'Tis of Thee." This piece demonstrates the creativity of a composer who borrowed a familiar theme and created unique ways to manipulate it. Compositional techniques selected from this piece are imitation, ornamentation, sequencing, diminution, and use of register. The technique of contrast is demonstrated through dynamics, harmonic and rhythmic modification, mood, and *legato* with *staccato*.

The next selection, *Variations on an American Folk Theme*, Opus 87, No.1, is a familiar piece built upon the lullaby, "All the Pretty Little Horses." This descriptive piece of music shows how the humorous character and creative skill of a composer can

be illustrated in a composition. Kabalevsky bridges the gap between sleeping and waking with compositional techniques of repetitive phrasing, diminution, passing tones, tempo changes, scale passages, octaves, dissonant chords and intervals, and contrasts of dynamics. Excerpts will be highlighted from each of the three mentioned compositions and then played on the piano in their entirety.

The researcher will then play her newly composed theme and variation entitled, *It's All in the Name*. The bulk of the demonstration will include an overview of the process involved in composing her piece, utilizing both traditional and newly innovative compositional techniques.

The researcher will use classroom videotape recordings of students to highlight the compositional process and performances. A PowerPoint presentation will also be shown to help present information from the study.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

In the context of this study, middle school students demonstrated the ability to create viable works as a result of a systematic approach to the development of compositional skills. This is confirmed by descriptive and analytical data, rubrics, journals, and videotapes of the composition (Appendices C, F, G, I). Analysis of the data leads the researcher to conclude that approaching composition in a sequential manner facilitates learning.

After studying various compositional techniques in Haydn, Beethoven, Kabalevsky, and Bell's compositions, subjects recognized retrograde, repetition, diminution, neighboring tones, meter and rhythm changes, dynamic contrasts, and key changes. They then applied these techniques to their own works.

### *Pre-instructional Questionnaire*

The pre-instructional questionnaire was administered to 48 general music students randomly enrolled in the researcher's class. The number of post-instructional questionnaires completed was different due to absences and family relocations. This caused discrepancies in the reported percentages. Subjects were asked to respond to questions concerning compositional experience by grade level and method of composing. The methods included adding words to familiar melodies, writing music with others, and composing alone. Subjects could also indicate no experience in composing. Subjects reported some compositional experience at designated grade levels in one or more of these methods:

- Ø Kindergarten - 19.15 %
- Ø First - 11.12 %
- Ø Second - 25.53 %
- Ø Third - 29.79 %



- θ Fourth – 65.96 %
- θ Fifth – 57.44 %
- θ Sixth – 65.96 %

### Student Perception of Composition Experience

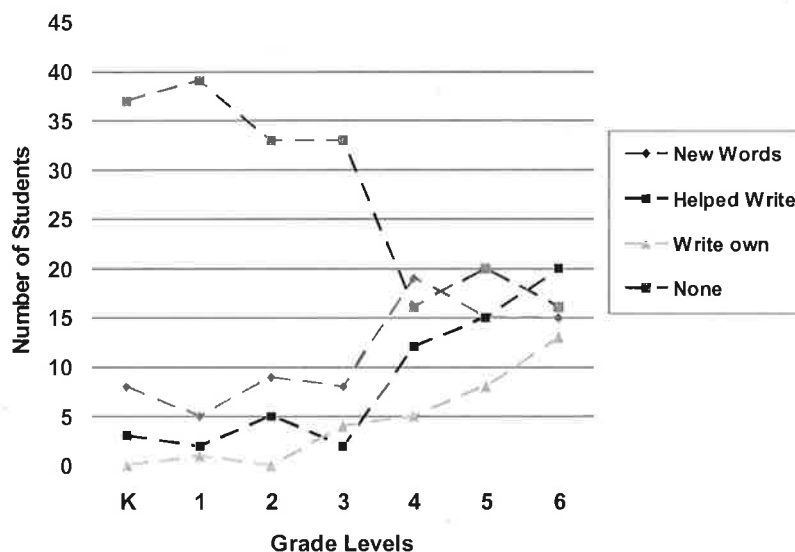
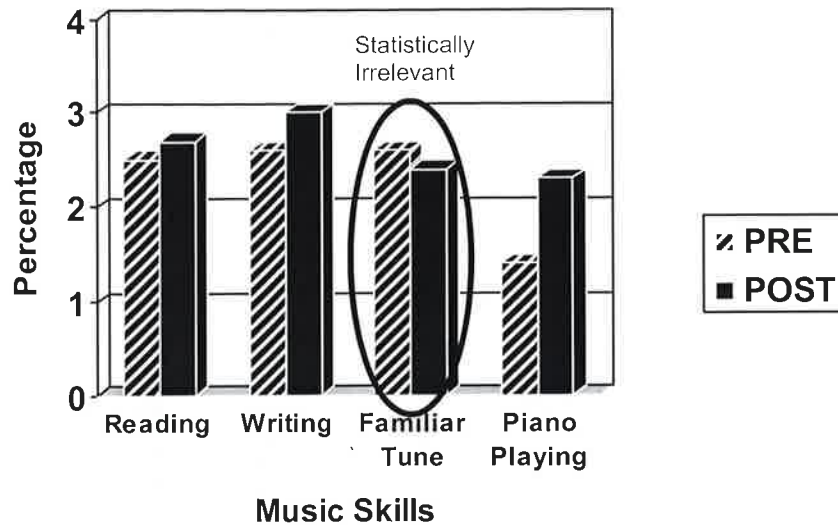


Figure 1. Student compositional experience

In the area of skills, a Likert scale from 0 to 4 was used for reporting data. The mean for the sample in the ability to read music was 2.5. The mean score for ability to write music on a staff was 2.7. In the area of the ability to make changes in a familiar tune, the mean was 2.6. The data indicated that the sample placed their abilities between “fair” and “good” in these areas. Subjects reported their ability to play the piano was between “poor” and “fair” with a mean score of 1.4 in Figure 2, as follows

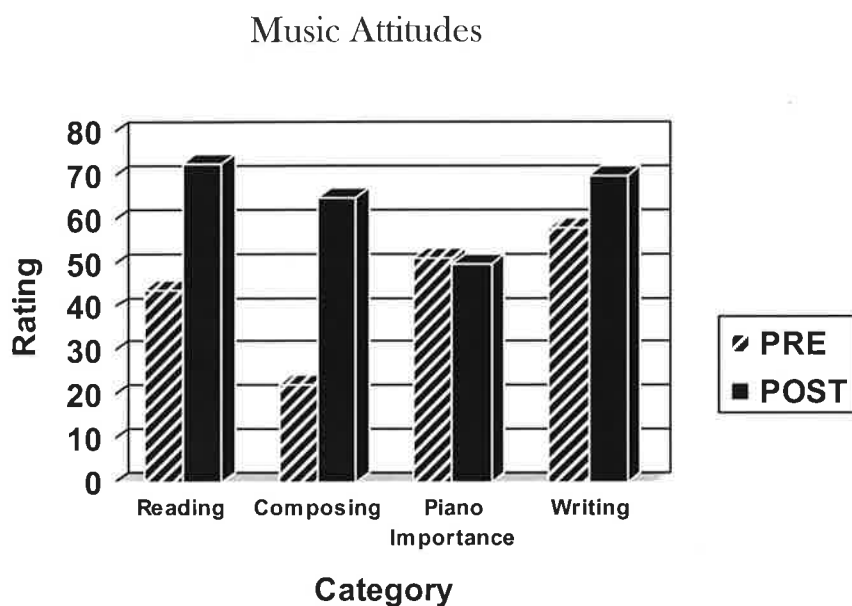
### Mean Skill Change



All skill sets measured had statistically significant improvement with the exception of "Familiar Tune," which remained statistically unchanged.

#### 2. Mean skill change

Subjects' attitudes toward composition were surveyed. Areas included reading, composing, piano playing, and writing music. Subjects indicated that 43.75 % agreed or strongly agreed that they were comfortable about reading music. In area of composition, 22.49% indicated that they were comfortable in composing. Fifty-one percent indicated that learning to play the piano was important. Just over 58% felt that learning to write music was important as in Figure 3 follows.

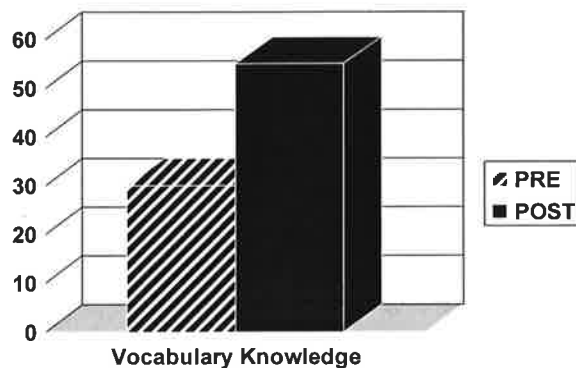


When analyzing the changes in attitudes, Reading and Composing music improved significantly.

*Figure 3.* Pre and post music attitudes

There was a section on the questionnaire concerning vocabulary words that was used to assess students' prior knowledge before instruction began. See Figure 4, as follows.

### Compositional Techniques Vocabulary Improvement



Compositional Techniques Vocabulary improved significantly from 30% correct to 55% correct

*Figure 4. Pre and post vocabulary knowledge*

#### *Post-instructional Questionnaire*

The post-instructional questionnaire was distributed to 40 subjects. The questionnaire was identical to the pre-instructional instrument. All subjects had experience in composing. Fifty-seven percent reported helping other students write their compositions. The mean score for reading music was 2.7; writing, 3.0; changing a familiar tune, 2.4; and the ability to play the piano, 2.3 (See Figure 2. p. 35).

In the area of attitudes, 72.5% of the subjects either agreed or strongly agreed they were comfortable reading music and 65% were comfortable composing. Fifty percent reported that learning to play the piano was important. Learning to write music was important to 70% of the subjects (see Figure 3, p. 36).

## *Reflections*

### *Attitudes*

"Creating and performing music promotes self-expression and provides self-gratification while giving pleasure to others" (MENC, 1994). Subjects enjoyed the opportunity to work on their compositions. Some subjects came in during lunch and after school to complete their projects. The researcher allowed subjects to fix problems on their own or with the help of other classmates. This composition project allowed the subjects to explore their own ideas, expand their "comfort zones," and take musical risks. In order to do this, the researcher provided subjects with a secure environment free from ridicule. During and at the completion of this project, subjects demonstrated pride in their accomplishments through voluntary visits to the music room during lunch and after school.

Subjects were excited about learning and creating their own pieces of music. Subjects manipulated the melodies in innovative ways, demonstrating creativity. The researcher observed subjects grow to the point where they assumed the role of a composer. By sharing her own composition, the researcher modeled for the subjects the conveyance of images, feelings, and ideas through music. Composition led to improved self-esteem, and most importantly, provided a way for students to express their own musical thoughts and to understand the music of others. In short, composition transforms students into musicians.

### *Assessments*

Subjects wrote in their reflective journals daily. The journals served as learning logs that facilitated problem solving and provided a medium for observations, ideas, and

insights about music experiences. Writings included information on compositional processes, techniques, and implementation. Subjects explained how each variation was composed, using appropriate vocabulary. They also described difficulties, setbacks, and solutions to musical problems. In using the rubric (Appendix F), subjects addressed the process of learning as well as the musical product. They saw the importance of having goals, mastering those goals, and evaluating their own progress. As a result, subjects became reflective thinkers.

The researcher found that the rule-bound methods for composition and techniques of composition that she had been exposed to in college were unsuccessful. The researcher began to formulate an alternative approach to teaching writing melodies with her students.

Composing a piece of music for the first time is a challenge for middle school students. Higher-order thinking and creativity are too rarely utilized in the classroom. Subjects were consistently encouraged by the researcher to think “outside of the box” and stretch their imaginations, sometimes beyond their “comfort zone.”

Teaching the process is as important as working toward the product. It is through “the process” that we see our students grapple with musical problems and solve them with or without teacher or peer help. This leads students to become more independent and involved a decision-making process. Subjects chose which techniques they would use for their compositions. They experimented with the notes to see which technique(s) worked best for their names. The researcher noted that subjects’ themes sounded modal in nature. Some subjects preferred minor sounding tones and others did not. After some

suggestions made by the researcher, the subjects made their own decisions regarding changes in pitch or motives and found solutions that best fit their compositions.

A value of composition is that the student learns structure and phrasing in a way that is more effective than learning through listening alone. Basic knowledge in a specific area supports creativity in that area; for example, knowledge of how a composer solves a musical problem assists the students in their own work. According to Wiggins (2005), "It is the *analysis* of the performance or listening experience that serves as the model more than the actual work. Students need to understand the options available to musicians and the tools they use to carry them out" (p. 39).

Subjects solved problems through their development of thematic material. They chose some common practices such as repetition, inversion, retrograde, transposition, alteration, addition, diminution, or augmentation. These changes became evident to the students through the connection of visual and auditory skills rather than by auditory input alone. Subjects also developed the use of a musical vocabulary to communicate accurately through journal writings and performances.

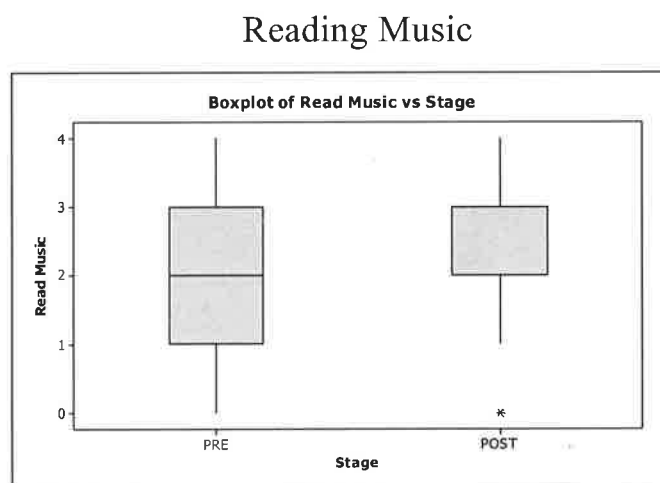
This project produced several excellent compositions (see Appendix G) as assessed by the rubric. The project provided students an opportunity to demonstrate divergent thinking skills, to improve attitudes, and to enhance involvement in the creative process. The project also sparked students' enthusiasm for music and an appreciation for its value in their social and educational development.

#### *Data Analysis*

Analysis of the data has led the researcher to conclude that a clearly defined sequential approach leads students to succeed in composing an original piece of music.

Student's perception of their composing experience improved drastically from the 4<sup>th</sup> grade to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade level (see Figure 1, p. 34).

In the area of the skills of making changes in a familiar tune, the self-reported abilities of the subjects declined from a mean of 2.6 to 2.4 (see Figure 2, p. 35). This skill was not addressed in the action research plan. The decline may be attributable to subjects' realization of what this skill encompasses. In the study, subjects were not asked to change the words to a familiar tune; they were asked to compose an original melody without lyrics. Also in the area of skills, playing another instrument was not relevant to this study's outcome. The median skill changes are represented in Figures 5, 6, 7, and 8.

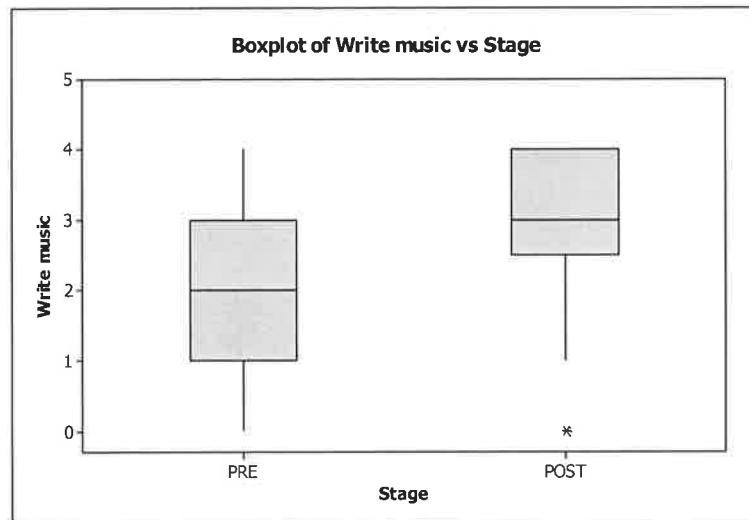


In the competency of "Reading Music," there was statistically significant improvement in the median scores between the PRE and POST stages.

*Figure 5. Reading music skills*



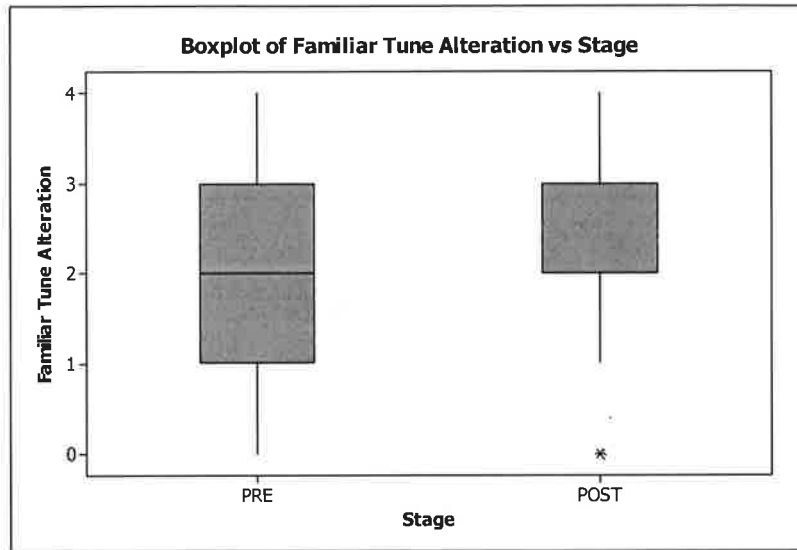
## Writing Music



In the competency of “Writing Music,” there was statistically significant improvement in the median scores between the PRE and POST periods.

*Figure 6. Writing music skills*

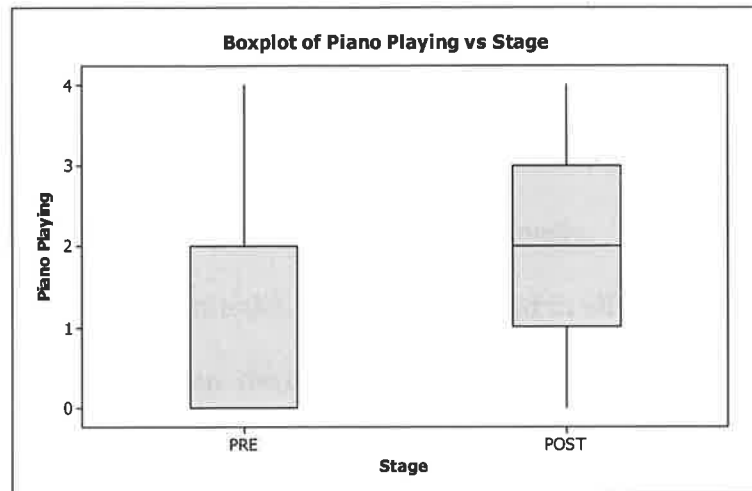
## Familiar Tunes Alteration



In the competency of "Familiar Tune Alteration," there was no statistically significant improvement in the median scores between the PRE and POST periods.

*Figure 7.* Skill change for familiar tunes alteration

## Piano Playing



In the competency of "Piano Playing," there was statistically significant improvement in the median scores between the PRE and POST periods.

*Figure 8.* Piano playing skills

Subjects also learned the following skills:

- θ Basic notation including staff, standard symbols for note names, and meter, dynamics, tempo, articulation, and expression.
- θ Composition of short pieces within specified guidelines.
- θ Skills for listening to selected works of major compositions.
- θ Pitch placement on the treble clef staff.
- θ Terminology for analysis and description of music.

With regard to changes in attitudes, students improved in all areas. Improvement in reading and composing music were the only components that were statistically significant (see Figure 3, p. 36). Subjects' attitudes toward learning to play the piano were the same before and after the study. The subjects may not value the importance of piano skills because the Finale Notepad software would perform their compositions for them.

#### *Recommendations*

Music educators are recommended to:

- θ Provide a sequential compositional framework for students.
- θ Present the elements of music and the principles of composition in a manner and context relevant to the students.
- θ Provide opportunities for students to evaluate and discuss their own works as well as the work of their peers.
- θ Accentuate the positive when evaluating students' own works and the work of their classmates.
- θ Continue to provide students with opportunities to compose music inside and outside the classroom.
- θ Encourage individual reflection and group discussion about the students' music compositions and the process necessary to accomplish the task.
- θ Provide time for daily music-journal writings.
- θ Emphasize process rather than product.
- θ Provide opportunities for live performances.

As demonstrated by this project, implementation of these recommendations will enhance the teaching/learning of composition in middle school general music classrooms.

The results of this study indicate that meeting Standard 4 of the National Music Standards (MENC, 1994) can be accomplished through a sequential approach within specified guidelines.

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## Figures

*Figure 1.* Student compositional experience

*Figure 2.* Mean skill change

*Figure 3.* Pre and post music attitudes

*Figure 4.* Pre and post vocabulary knowledge

*Figure 5.* Reading music skills

*Figure 6.* Writing music skills

*Figure 7.* Skill change for familiar tunes alteration

*Figure 8.* Piano playing skills

## Appendix A

### Instruments used:

Parental consent form

Pre-Instructional questionnaire

Post-Instructional questionnaire

Musical alphabet chart

*My Composition* staff paper

*My Composition Rubric*

Subjects' reflective journals

Compositions (Subjects, teacher and exemplars)

Videotape of Subjects' performances

Classroom keyboards

Piano

Four computers with Finale Notepad 2005a notation software

November 15, 2005

**Parental Consent Form**

Dear Parents,

I am currently working on my Master of Arts in Music Education degree at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. During the next nine weeks, I will be conducting action research in my Albritton Junior High School seventh grade general music classes. The purpose of this project is to study middle school students' creativity and level of participation in composing their own musical work. Students will learn how to write a melody and manipulate this melody utilizing compositional techniques to create a form known as theme and variations. This project will also support the National and DoDEA content music standards.

Your son/daughter will be involved in this study by way of the following:

1. Pre-test on writing a musical composition.
2. Post-test on writing a musical composition.
3. Journal reflections on the compositional process.
4. Videotaping of keyboard/piano instruction.
5. Digital recording and/or sheet music of student's own theme and variations composition.

There are no foreseeable risks to the students involved. Specific information about individual students will be kept *strictly confidential*. The results from the study will not reference any individual student by his/her full name. The purpose of this form is to allow your child to participate in the study and to allow the researcher to use the information obtained from the actual study to analyze the outcomes of the study. The parent signature below also indicates that the student understands and agrees to participate cooperatively.

If you have additional questions regarding the study, please call me at the school (907-0998) or e-mail me at [JeanMarie.Bell@am.dodea.edu](mailto:JeanMarie.Bell@am.dodea.edu).

---

PRINCIPAL'S SIGNATURE

---

STUDENT'S NAME

---

SIGNATURE OF PARENT/GUARDIAN

---

DATE

# Appendix C

Number \_\_\_\_\_  
 Class period \_\_\_\_\_  
 Semester 1 2 3 4

## MUSIC COMPOSITION

Think back over the years when you have had music classes. Place a check mark in the area(s) below that apply to your compositional experience within each grade level. If an area does not apply to you, then leave it blank.

### MY COMPOSITION EXPERIENCE

Grade	I added new words to a familiar melody	I helped write music with others	I wrote my own music	No experience
K				
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				

Circle the number that most accurately describes your level of music abilities at this time.

### MY MUSIC SKILLS

I Can...	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Not at all
S1. Read music	4	3	2	1	0
S2. Write music on a staff	4	3	2	1	0
S3. Make changes in a familiar tune	4	3	2	1	0
S4. Play the piano	4	3	2	1	0
S5. Play another instrument	4	3	2	1	0

Carefully read the statements below and circle the rating that best describes your attitude toward music at this time. Categories are rated as SA- *Strongly Agree*, A- *Agree*, U- *Undecided*, D- *Disagree*, and SD- *Strongly Disagree*.

MY MUSIC ATTITUDES	RATINGS				
A1. I am comfortable with reading music.	SA	A	U	D	SD
A2. I feel comfortable composing a piece of music.	SA	A	U	D	SD
A3. Learning to play the piano is important to me.	SA	A	U	D	SD
A4. Learning to write music is important to me.	SA	A	U	D	SD

Match each definition to a word in the right hand column. Place the correct letter in the blank. Use each letter only once.

### MY MUSIC VOCABULARY

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. a main idea that is developed into variations
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. also known as the time signature
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. can change the tonality from major to minor or vice versa
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. changes in volume from loud to soft or vice versa
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. the structure of a piece of music
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. when a composer makes the original note values shorter
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. rhythmic or melodic changes made involving the theme
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. a fragment of a melody
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. a rhythmic or melodic pattern that is restated
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. to go backwards

- A. retrograde
- B. modulation
- C. diminution
- D. meter
- E. form
- F. theme
- G. repetition
- H. motive
- I. variation
- J. dynamics



## Musical Alphabet Chart

<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>
h	i	j	k	l	m	n
o	p	q	r	s	t	u
v	w	x	y	z		

Appendix E

*My Composition Staff Paper*



STUDENT COMPOSITION



Appendix F  
**MY COMPOSITION RUBRIC**

CATEGORIES	4	3	2	1	CAT. WEIGHT	COMMENTS
<b>Composing Theme and Variations</b>	Student composes an original melody on a treble staff utilizing three compositional techniques and explains the form using appropriate terminology.	Student composes an original melody on a treble staff utilizing two or more compositional techniques and explains the form with few inaccuracies.	Student composes an original melody on a treble staff utilizing one compositional technique and explains the form with some inaccuracies.	Student composes an original melody on a treble staff but demonstrates some difficulty using compositional techniques and basic forms.	$\frac{\text{---}}{\text{---}} \times 10$ = $\frac{\text{---}}{\text{---}}$	
<b>Melodic Notation</b>	Student uses the correct pitches from the alphabet chart and properly notates the melody on the treble staff.	Student uses incorrect pitches from the alphabet chart but properly notates the melody on the treble staff.	Student uses the correct pitches from the alphabet chart but improperly notates the melody on the treble staff.	Student uses incorrect pitches according to the alphabet chart and improperly notates the melody on the treble staff.	$\frac{\text{---}}{\text{---}} \times 3$ = $\frac{\text{---}}{\text{---}}$	
<b>Rhythmic Notation</b>	Student varies rhythmic patterns using four or more different note values to demonstrate unity and contrast effectively.	Student varies rhythmic patterns using three different note values to demonstrate unity and contrast effectively.	Student varies rhythmic patterns using two different note values with some inaccuracies.	Student uses one note value to compose his/her melody.	$\frac{\text{---}}{\text{---}} \times 3$ = $\frac{\text{---}}{\text{---}}$	
<b>Journal Reflections</b>	Student explains their role in the compositional process, describes their approaches and what they have learned effectively.	Student explains their role in the compositional process and describes what they have learned effectively.	Student explains few details in the compositional process.	Student does not complete a journal entry.	$\frac{\text{---}}{\text{---}} \times 7$ = $\frac{\text{---}}{\text{---}}$	
<b>Performance</b>	Student can perform his/her original melody and variations on the piano with expression, confidence and accuracy.	Student can perform his/her original melody and two variations on the piano with expression, confidence and accuracy.	Student can perform his/her original melody and one variation on the piano with confidence and some inaccuracy.	Student can perform his/her original melody on the piano.	$\frac{\text{---}}{\text{---}} \times 2$ = $\frac{\text{---}}{\text{---}}$	
	4 x Category Weight	3 x Category Weight	2 x Category Weight	1 x Category Weight		Total of combined categories equals <---overall score

# A funny jingle

Marquia G.

Piano

theme

VAR.I

*mp*

VAR.II

*mf*

# My life

Veronica R.

theme

Piano



var. I



var. II



# Dark Element

Wesley R

theme

Piano

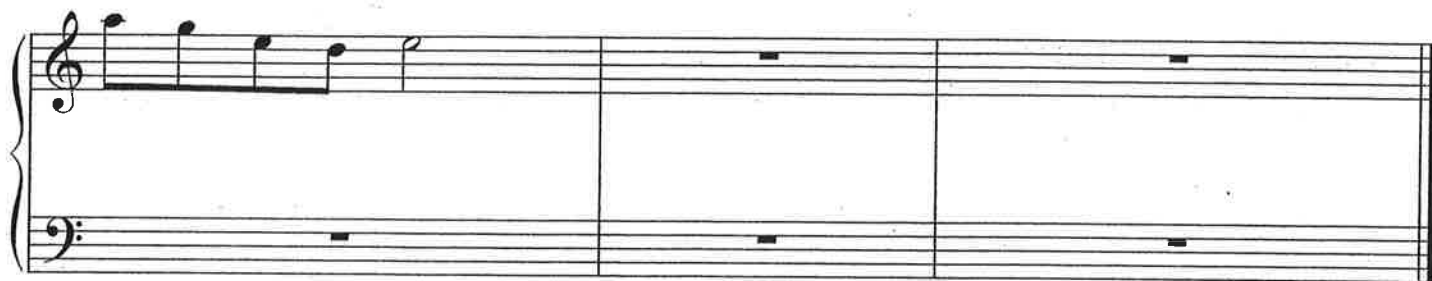


1



2



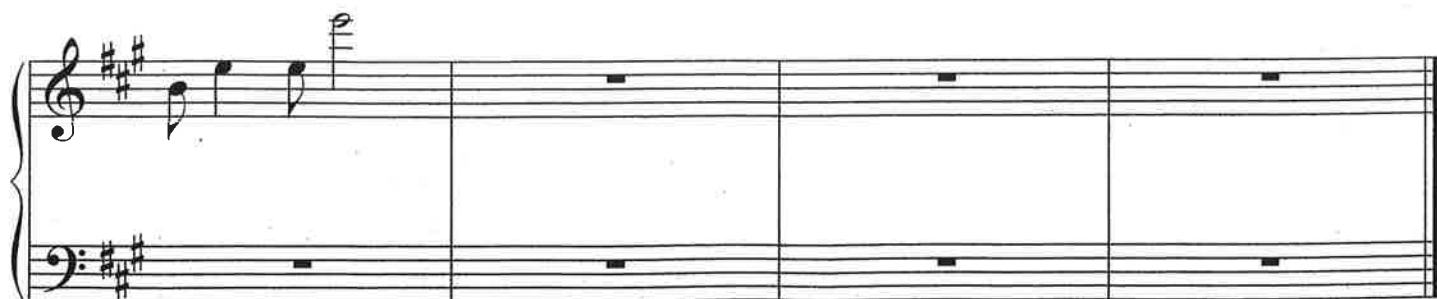
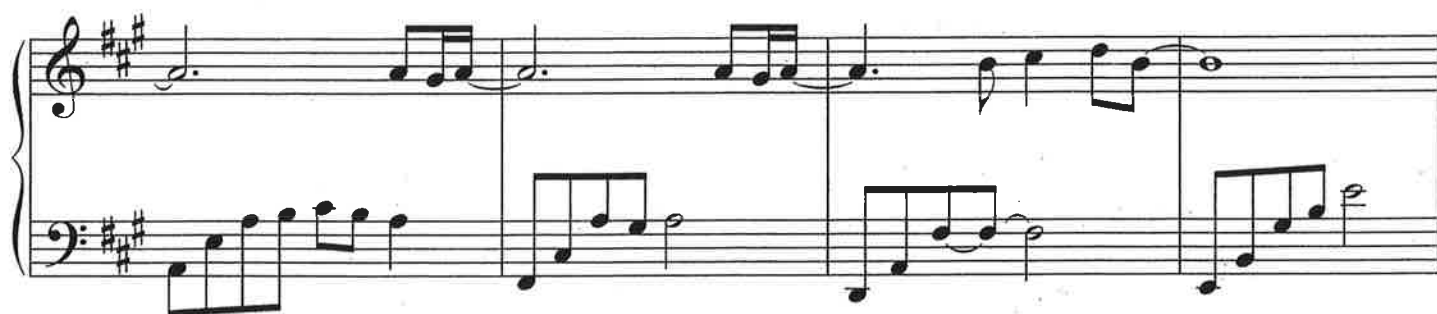
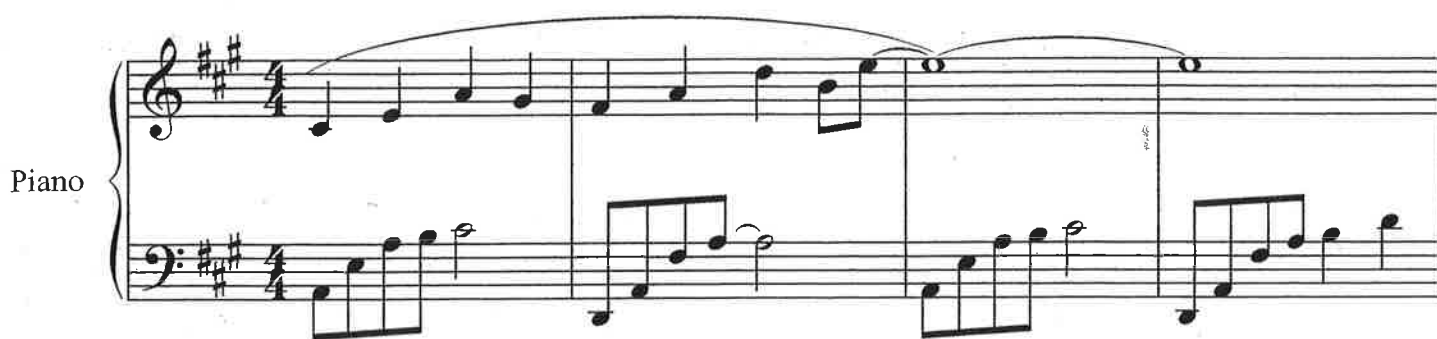


# It's All in the Name

NAME THEME

Jean Marie Bell

Piano





# Namin' Notes

Jean Marie Bell

Piano

The first system of music is written for piano in treble and bass clefs. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is common time (C). The melody in the treble clef consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a final measure containing a half note and a quarter note. The bass clef accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the first two measures, followed by a half note and a quarter note in the final measure.

The second system of music continues the piece. The treble clef melody includes a half note, a quarter note, and a half note, ending with a quarter note. The bass clef accompaniment continues with eighth notes, featuring a half note and a quarter note in the final measure. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

# Haydn Seek

Jean Marie Bell

Piano

The first system of musical notation for 'Haydn Seek' is written for piano. It consists of two staves, treble and bass, joined by a brace on the left. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. The treble staff contains a continuous eighth-note melody. The bass staff provides a simple harmonic accompaniment with quarter notes.

The second system of musical notation continues the piece. The treble staff features a more complex melody with eighth-note runs and some rests. The bass staff continues with a steady quarter-note accompaniment.

8va

The third system of musical notation concludes the piece. The treble staff is marked with '8va' (octave up), indicating that the melody should be played an octave higher than written. It features a series of chords and eighth-note patterns. The bass staff continues with the same quarter-note accompaniment.

# Playful Child

Jean Marie Bell

Piano

*mf*

The first system of musical notation is for a piano piece in 4/4 time, key of D major (two sharps). The right hand begins with a melody starting on D5, moving up stepwise to A5, then down to G5, F#5, E5, and D5. The left hand provides a steady accompaniment of quarter notes, starting on D4 and moving up stepwise to D5. The dynamic marking *mf* (mezzo-forte) is placed above the first measure of the right hand.

*tr* Legato *p*

The second system continues the piece. The right hand features a trill (marked *tr*) on A5 in the third measure, followed by a series of eighth notes. The left hand continues its quarter-note accompaniment. The dynamic marking *p* (piano) appears in the fifth measure, and the instruction "Legato" is written above the right hand.

*mf*

The third system shows the right hand playing a series of eighth notes, moving up and then down. The left hand continues with quarter notes. The dynamic marking *mf* is placed above the right hand in the third measure.

68

The fourth system concludes the piece. The right hand plays a final melody of eighth notes. The left hand continues with quarter notes. The page number 68 is centered below the system.

# Lament for Dad

Expressively

Jean Marie Bell

Piano

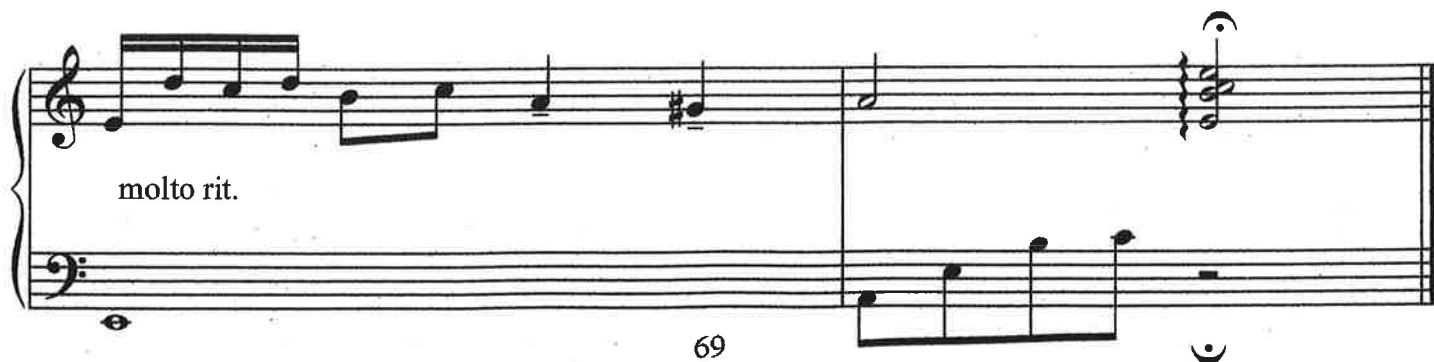
*mp*



Rubato



*molto rit.*



# Spanish Spice

With a festive feel

Jean Marie Bell

Piano

The musical score is written for piano in 4/4 time with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). It consists of four systems of two staves each. The first system includes a piano (p) dynamic marking in the bass staff and a forte (f) dynamic marking in the treble staff. The melody in the treble staff features a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together, with some measures containing triplets. The bass staff provides a steady accompaniment with eighth notes. The second system continues the melodic and harmonic patterns. The third system introduces some rests in the treble staff, while the bass staff maintains its rhythmic flow. The fourth system concludes the piece with a final melodic flourish in the treble staff and a steady bass accompaniment.

## Spanish Spice

The musical score for "Spanish Spice" is presented in two systems. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The first system spans four measures. The treble staff features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including a triplet in the second measure. The bass staff provides a steady accompaniment of eighth notes. The second system also spans four measures. The treble staff continues the melody, incorporating some chords and a final whole note. The bass staff continues the accompaniment, ending with a whole note. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

# Mean Jarie

Jean Marie Bell

Piano

*mf*

The first system of music is in 4/4 time with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The piano part consists of two staves. The right hand starts with a melody of eighth and quarter notes, while the left hand provides a steady bass line of quarter notes. The dynamic marking *mf* (mezzo-forte) is placed above the first measure.

*f*

The second system continues the piece. The right hand features more complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth notes. A crescendo hairpin is shown between the two staves, leading to a dynamic marking of *f* (forte) at the end of the system.

*ff* rit. deliberate molto rit.

The third system begins with a dynamic marking of *ff* (fortissimo). The tempo markings *rit.* (ritardando), *deliberate*, and *molto rit.* (molto ritardando) are placed above the right-hand staff. The music features a mix of eighth and quarter notes in both hands.

The fourth system shows the final measures of the piece. The right hand has whole rests, while the left hand plays a simple bass line of quarter notes. The system concludes with a double bar line.

# 3 on 3

Jean Marie Bell

Rubato con poco mosso

Piano

*mp*

3

8va second time only

*f*

1st ending

2nd ending

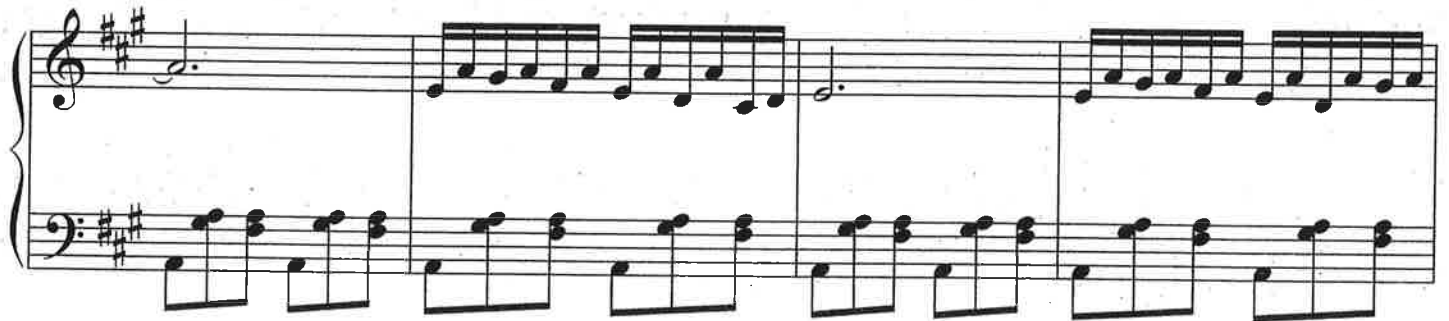
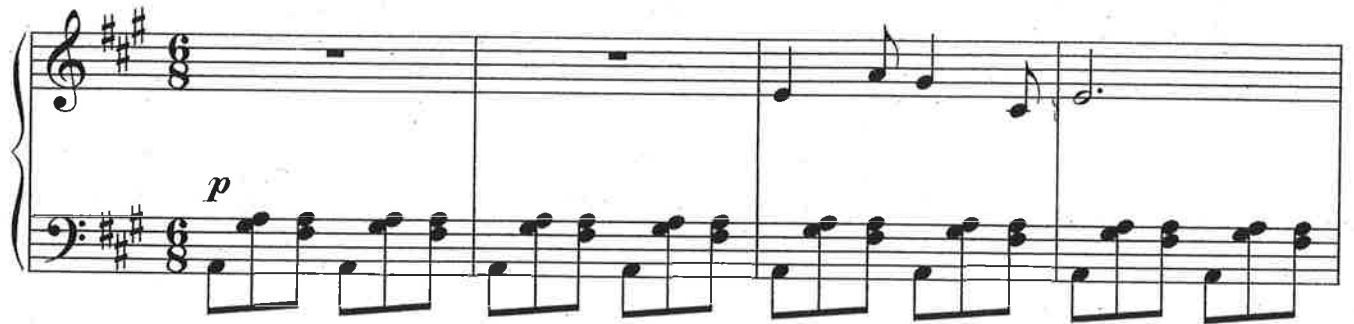
*mp*



# Piggyback Track

Jean Marie Bell

Piano



# Bell Chimes

Jean Marie Bell

Piano

*f*

*Ped.*

*fine*

*mp*

1 2

D.C. al Fine

## Appendix I

# Students' Reflective Journal Responses on a Middle School Composition Project

### SKILLS

Wesley- "While creating the piece I had some problems: knowing how to start and keeping the notes to make sense. I also had some trouble creating variations that use the same notes, but I solved the problem by sitting at the keyboard and playing the piece again and again."

Marquia- "In my first variation I used retrograde because I like the way my name sounded backwards. In my second variation I changed the rhythm and tempo to make a happy tune."

Gideon- "My first variation is in a major key and my second one is mostly in a minor key. I mixed up some letters in my name to create a different melody."

### KNOWLEDGE

Tyler- "I learned the lines and spaces on the treble and bass clef."

Wesley - "I have learned to play the piano and how to make a piece of music."

Tony- "I have learned how to read, write and play my music."

Krystal- "We learned how to play words on the piano."

Haley- "I learned about the form theme and variation. I also learned different ways to write a piece of music."

Gideon- "I did my project based on changes in notes, meter, and adding rests. Just these three things make a difference."

Dominique- "Accidentals in music are called flats, sharps, naturals, double sharps and double flats. I chose to use sharps in my first variation because it makes my music sound a lot better."

Max- "The difficulties in this project were finding the right keys for my name so the song would sound right."

Veronica- "I learned how to play my name on the piano!"

Simone - "I can basically understand the notes and play a little on the piano but I need to practice A LOT!"

Krystal - "We learned what a scale is and different types like major, minor, and chromatic."

Zach - "To be a composer, I have undergone immense mental training."

### ATTITUDES

Wesley - "When I was done my piece of music, I was happy for what I made."

Max - "In the beginning I felt overwhelmed by the whole thing, in the middle I felt good because I actually understood the project. In the end, I had made a song about my own name. It almost sounded like the Campbell's soup commercial."

Tierra – “I am having difficulty learning the notes on the piano. I want to practice more so my song will be good for next week when we play our song for the class.”

Saleste – “My favorite part of playing my composition was my first name because it’s really bouncy and giddy like me.” “I really like to play my composition and my sister even asked me to help her to play her name. I thought this was pretty cool because she normally doesn’t like me to help her.”

Simone- “Composing makes me think too hard!”

Gideon- “It’s kind of hard to do this project, but after I’ve learned all about notes and the ways they can be used, it is a lot easier... I really enjoyed doing this project. I hope we’ll have another one soon.”

Krystal – “Composing is hard and fun at the same time. I am nervous about playing the piano in front of everyone.”

Kaiulani – “Being a composer really doesn’t excite me all that much because I don’t like to compose music; I just like to listen to it. Now I have a whole new outlook on being a composer. A composer has to learn how to read music, how to write it and a whole lot of other things.”

Lexi – “When this project is over I will probably write some more music. When I get older, I hope this will help me out with my dream job.”

### **PROBLEMS SOLVING STRATEGY**

Tony- “I have to figure out whether I want to use my first, middle, last name or all three. The key to solving these problems is to play around with your name. You can add sharps or flats to the notes just to see if it sounds good.”

### **JOURNAL ENTRY CLASSIC**

Justin – “I think I just blew my grade. I have no idea of what I am doing and I don’t want to go to her (Mrs. Bell) with nothing. I need to get something down on paper quick.”

compositions with the traditional music of his native country. However, Kabalevsky's *Variations on an American Folk Theme*, Op. 87, No. 1, was inspired by the American lullaby, "All the Pretty Little Horses." The theme is stated in ABA form, followed by six variations. Kabalevsky uses major-minor interplay, scale passages, sequencing, dynamic contrasts, diminution, mood, and tone clusters to demonstrate various compositional techniques.

### It's All in the Name

This original composition represents a personal journey through the composer's life from childhood to adulthood. The inspiration for this composition comes from the composer's own name. Character and emotions play an important role in each of the nine variations. The creativity of the composer is reflected in the titles of each variation, as well as in the compositional techniques demonstrated in each variation.

Name Theme  
Namin' Notes  
Haydn Seek  
Playful Child  
Lament for Dad  
Spanish Spice  
Mean Jarie  
3 on 3  
Piggyback Track  
Bell Chimes

The audience is cordially invited to a reception following the recital in the front foyer, hosted by the Sigma Alpha Iota Chapter.

Please be courteous and turn off all cell phones during this evening's performance.

The University of North Carolina at Pembroke  
Department of Music

presents

Jean Marie Bell  
in  
**A Sequential Approach  
to Composition**



Graduate Applied Music Project Recital

April 11, 2006, 7:30 PM

Moore Hall Auditorium

## PROGRAM

### Introduction

### What Is Composition?

### Why Compose?

### Inspirations

### Form/Theme and Variations

### Compositional Processes and Techniques

### *Il maestro e lo scolare*

Joseph Haydn (1732 - 1809)

### Seven Variations in C on "God Save the King"

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 - 1827)

### Variations on an American Folk Theme, Op. 87, No. 1

Dimitri Kabalevsky (1904 - 1987)

### Bell's Compositional Process

### It's All in the Name

Jean Marie Bell (1964 - )

### Educational Approaches to Composition

### Students' Compositional Process

### Student Compositions and Performances

### Student Outcomes

#### Skills

#### Knowledge

#### Attitudes

### Conclusion

### *Il maestro e lo scolare*

This first selection is a duet for piano, four hands, entitled *Il maestro e lo scolare* (The teacher and the pupil), written in 1778, while Haydn was employed by Prince Esterhazy as Kapellmeister. This divertimento was composed for pedagogical purposes and was performed in private homes for the purposes of listening and performing. The duet opens with an *Andante* and proceeds with seven variations during which the teacher plays a phrase and the pupil repeats the same phrase two octaves higher. The form of this piece is rounded binary. Variation techniques used by Haydn include imitation, ornamentation, register, diminution, repetition, and crossing of hands. The work closes with a simple minuet without trio, and Haydn refrains from further using the imitative principle. Fitting for the piece, the performer has chosen her piano instructor at UNCP, Dr. Jonathan Maisonnier, to accompany her.

### Seven Variations in C on "God Save the King"

The tune and text of "God Save the King" were first presented as a gift to King James III of England in 1745 and later became a model for anthems and hymns of other countries. Today, the tune is recognized by American students as "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" and is adopted by Liechtenstein as its national anthem. This piece, published in 1804, demonstrates the creativity of a composer who borrowed a familiar theme and created unique ways to manipulate it. Compositional techniques selected from this piece are imitation, ornamentation, sequencing, diminution, meter, and use of register. The technique of contrast is demonstrated through dynamics, harmonic and rhythmic modification, mood, and *legato* with *staccato*.

### Variations on an American Folk Theme, Op. 87, No. 1

Known for his outstanding work in music education, Dimitri Kabalevsky wrote many pieces for young performers. Through his use of Russian folk melodies, Kabalevsky infused his

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